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C. Rollins Hanlon

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The Objectives of Catholic Medical Education

C. ROLLINS HANLON, M.D.

There are two aspects from which we should approach the subject of "The Objectives of Catholic Medical Education," the first being an examination of medical education in general and the second being the specific "Catholic" aspect of the subject.

We may ask three questions about medical education in general. First of all, what are its objectives; secondly, what is the mechanism by which these objectives are to be reached; and finally, how is activity in this area to be evaluated. This is a subject which we could discuss anywhere—in a meeting of deans from non-denominational schools or in any other educational forum. But we wish to concentrate here on our own specific topic which is the peculiarly Catholic aspect of medical education.

How is Catholic medical education different from medical education in general? Is it different in the sense of being opposed to certain general aspects of medical education? Or, is it more ample, more permeated by a kind of ethical, philosophical, or

religious background which gives it greater meaning and significance?

To cover the topic in the short time available, I will particularize the matter by asking a question of myself. "Why am I here rather than at Johns Hopkins, in California, or at the National Institutes of Health?"; and, directing the question to you, I can ask, "Why should you or your sons or your friends be here or in any other area of Catholic medical education rather than somewhere else?" To answer this, we need to focus down on how good objectively is our Catholic medical education in this technological civilization.

How precise, up-to-date, and full are the facts, the techniques, and the technology that a person is going to learn in this particular school? Will it be classified as grade A, grade B; will it be good, excellent, or mediocre? These simple criteria are the things about which our civilization is concerned today. It is concerned to a great degree with purely technical aspects of things. It tends to divert us farther and farther away from the true meaning of life; that is to say, man's destiny and the way he is working in fulfillment. We see, then, that in certain quarters or

by certain standards, a school is evaluated by the extent to which it tells you about immunology, the latest operations in surgery, or the latest hormones in medicine. If technique were everything, this would be the only criterion by which you would need to evaluate whether a school is good, bad, or indifferent.

One thing which is attractive about technical criteria is the fact that they can be compared. If students from this school take an examination and demonstrate a certain amount of information about neoplasia, this can be compared with the performance of students from the University of California, who are thereby indicated as knowing more or less than the students in this school. Thus, you may set up a grading system and say that this school is good, better, or worse in the category of neoplasia than some other school.

Now this measurement has certain pragmatic advantages, but I don't believe that this is enough. Nor do I believe that the best intentions in the world or the best underlying philosophy in the world is enough unless you have added to it an adequate technology. To specify the nature of good Catholic surgery, I don't believe it is sufficient to say that one should merely pray before, during, or after the operation, openly or otherwise, in order to mark the surgery as good and Catholic. However, this example strikes close to the truth, in that an operation or any

action you carry out in your daily medical practice constitutes a prayer in the sense that it is one portion of the working out of your destiny. Now the setting in which you work out your destiny, whether as priest, student, surgeon or scholar, is not the most important aspect of your activity. The essential element one is trying to inculcate in students is the idea of working out of one's destiny, having a clear view of the objective being sought, while turning in a performance which will stand comparison by any of the customary technical yardsticks, and will compare favorably with a performance in the same category by anyone.

We cannot graduate doctors who are concentrating so on their destiny that they are poor technologists. They must know their surgery as they are in competition with first rate surgeons from elsewhere. We want them to be as skillful as surgeons anywhere; in addition to that, and permeating all of their activities, should be the constant clear perception that they are working out their destiny and that this is more important than mere technique. They should be constantly demonstrating to others the essential dignity and ultimate aim of man as exemplified by the manner in which they perform their particular work.

This is a brief and incomplete statement, but I think it touches at least on the objectives, the aims, and the goals of Catholic medical education.

Dr. Hanlon is Professor and Director of the Department of Surgery, St. Louis University, School of Medicine.